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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8581
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6515
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 6839
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2132
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4878
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6081
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2458
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0145
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4202
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 3891
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2083
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3237
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000607

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/29/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DECLARES NEPAL A REPUBLIC

REF: KATHMANDU 602

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

1. (SBU) Close to midnight on May 28, Nepal's Constituent Assembly voted overwhelmingly to make the country a federal, democratic republic and abolish the 240-year-old monarchy. The Interim Government also tabled a bill to amend the Interim Constitution to establish a ceremonial president as the head of state. After holding its first meeting, the Assembly recessed for a week to give the political parties time to reach agreement on outstanding issues, including amendments to the Interim Constitution, the creation of a new Maoist-led government, the allocation of other top offices and the appointment of 26 nominated Members of Parliament. With a few notable exceptions, May 28 passed largely peacefully.

Nepal Declared Republic, Monarchy Abolished

2. (U) Around 11:25 p.m. local time on May 28, Acting Chairman of the Constituent Assembly (CA) Kul Bahadur Gurung announced to the Assembly, the senior civil service, civil society, the press and the diplomatic corps gathered in the Birendra International Conference Center (BICC) in Kathmandu that Nepal was henceforth a federal, democratic republic. The motion stripped the monarchy of all special legal, cultural, social and traditional rights and privileges and directed King Gyanendra and his family to vacate Narayanhiti Palace within 15 days. The vote to create the republic and abolish the 240-year-old Shah dynasty was overwhelming. Out of the CA's 564 members present, only four (all members of the royalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) - Nepal) voted against. Debate on the motion was kept short. Four Members of Parliament (MPs) were authorized to speak for two minutes each. The only MP to speak in favor of retaining the monarchy, from RPP - Nepal, was cut off after he ran over a few minutes. The Interim Government had already declared May 28-30 a holiday in anticipation of the republic declaration and celebrations were ongoing all day.

Bill To Establish Presidency Tabled

¶3. (SBU) The other major business during the CA's first session was the tabling of a bill to amend the Interim Constitution to delete all references to the monarch and establish a ceremonial president as head of state in his place. Home Minister Krishna Sitaula from the Prime Minister's Nepali Congress (NC) (who lost his election contest) tabled the amendments on behalf of the Interim Government. The draft bill provides that the President shall be the supreme commander of the Nepal Army, and shall receive the credentials of ambassadors. Other notable events during the roughly two-hour meeting, which started after 9 p.m., more than 10 hours later than scheduled, included short remarks by a frail-looking Prime Minister Girija Koirala, which were read in full by his NC colleague Peace Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, the reading by Chairman Gurung of a congratulatory message from the Speaker of the Indian Parliament, and the Assembly's adoption of interim procedures.

Assembly Recessed For A Week

¶4. (SBU) Gurung declared shortly before midnight that the Assembly would be recessed until June 6. Senior politicians indicated afterwards that the recess was intended to give the political parties time to reach agreement on outstanding issues. These include possible additional amendments to the Interim Constitution to flesh out the respective powers of the President and the Prime Minister, a change in the votes

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required to form or bring down a government and a revision to the membership of the National Security Council. Among other matters which have yet to be decided are the formation and makeup of a new Maoist-led government and the related question of allocating other top offices, including the President, Vice President, Chairman and Vice Chairman. Progress has been made in recent days on appointing the Assembly's 26 nominated MPs, but, according to press accounts, final agreement proved elusive on May 28.

May 28 Largely Peaceful

¶5. (C) May 28 passed largely without incident. A crowd of approximately 1,000 pro-King demonstrators clashed with pro-republic supporters in Ratna Park in central Kathmandu in early evening. Around the same time, a small group of demonstrators threw stones outside the BICC and were teargassed by the police. Two pipe bombs exploded outside the BICC later in the evening before the session began. According to police sources, a suspect from Ranabir Sena, the Hindu extremist group which claimed responsibility for other recent bombings in Kathmandu, including two outside the BICC the evening of May 26, was arrested at the BICC the evening of May 28.

Comment

¶6. (C) Despite concerns that political differences might prevent the parties from fulfilling their commitment to the people of Nepal to declare the country a republic as planned, in the end they kept their word. By the time the Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy, many Nepalis had probably gone to sleep. The repeatedly delayed proceedings and lackluster speech by the Prime Minister certainly did not inspire confidence that a new era for Nepal had begun. The session was also notable for the absence of any public role by Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (aka Prachanda). He joined the MPs in applauding with obvious delight when the monarchy was officially abolished, but other than casting their votes, he and his party comrades spent nearly the entire session in their seats observing the goings-on. Post is pleased that the events of May 28 passed largely without

incident, but Nepal's political transition is far from over.
POWELL